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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 2769

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, LA

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY LOOK AT NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT

(PGNU) AND JOINT NATIONAL POLITICAL COUNCIL (JNPC)

REF: VIENTIANE 2714

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEW PGNU/JNPC
CONTAINED A NUMBER OF SURPRISES ON THE LPF SIDE AND
VIRTUALLY NONE ON THE RLG SIDE. SOUPHANOUVONG WILL
BE CHAIRMAN OF THE JNPC RATHER THAN DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER. THIS MOVE COULD HAVE BEEN MOTIVATED BY HIS
AVERSION TO BEING SUBORDINATED TO SOUVANNA, BUT MAY
ALSO MEAN THAT THE COMMUNIST SIDE ENVISAGES THE JNPC
AS A VEHICLE FOR EXPANDING THE POWER OF ITS PARTY
LEADERS IN THE RLG ZONE, WHILE FREEING THEM FROM
FORMAL GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES. THIS IMPLICATION IS
STRENGTHENED BY THE ABSENCE OF SIGNIFICANT COMMUNIST LEADERS

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FROM THE CABINET, EXCEPT FOR PHOUMI VONGVICHIT WHO WILL SERVE
AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/FOREIGN MINISTER, AND GENERAL

SINGKAPO, WHO WILL BE PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER.

ON THE RLG SIDE, ONLY TWO MEMBERS OF THE PREVIOUS CABINET WERE DROPPED, AND ONLY TWO NEW FACES ADDED. THE REMAINDER WERE SLIGHTLY RESHUFFLED. SISOUK, PHENG PHONGSAVAN AND LEUAM INSIS-IENGMAY RETAIN DEFENSE, INTERIOR AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/ EDUCATION MINISTER POSITIONS RESPECTIVELY, AND NGON SANANIKONE MOVES FROM PUBLIC WORKS TO FINANCE. ON BALANCE, THE CABINET DOES NOT COME OUT BADLY; OF THE FOUR KEY MINISTRIES OF DEFENSE, INTERIOR, FINANCE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THE FIRST THREE HAVE POWERFUL RLG MINISTERS AND WEAK LPF DEPUTIES, WHILE THE FOURTH PAIRS A FLEXIBLE SENIOR LPF LEADER WITH A CAPABLE RLG DEPUTY, TIANETHONE CHANTERASY.

MANY QUESTIONS REMAIN UNANSWERED, INCLUDING THE POWER AND RELATIONSHIP OF THE JNPC VIS-A-VIS THE PGNU; THE FATE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THE RLG BUDGETARY PROCESS ASSOCIATED WITH IT; WHO WILL BECOME ACTING PRIME MINISTER IF SOUVANNA GOES ABROAD; WHAT HAPPENS TO THE JOINT COMMISSION TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT (JCIA) AND ITS FUNCTIONS UNDER THE PROTOCOL NOW THAT ITS TOP LEADERS FROM BOTH SIDES' DELEGATIONS HAVE BEEN CO-OPTED INTO THE NEW GOVERNMENT? WITH LAO NEW YEAR ON THE DOORSILL (APRIL 13-16), WE DO NOT EXPECT THESE QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED FOR SOME TIME. END SUMMARY.

1. LAOS IS ALWAYS FULL OF SURPRISES, AND ONE OF THEM TURNED OUT TO BE THE COMPOSITION OF THE LPF SIDE OF THE PGNU.

2. SOUPHANOUVONG, WIDELY EXPECTED TO RESUME HIS 1962 POSITION AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, WILL SERVE INSTEAD AS CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT NATIONAL POLITICAL COUNCIL (JNPC). THIS MOVE MAY PARTLY STEM FROM SOUPHANOUVONG'S AVERSION TO ASSUMING SUBORDINATE POSITION AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TO SOUVANNA, BUT MAY ALSO MEAN THAT THE COMMUNIST SIDE ENVISAGES THIS BODY AS THE VEHICLE FOR ITS TOP PARTY OFFICIALS TO FREE THEM OF FORMAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES. IF THIS IS THE CASE, IT MAY PROVE A MORE IMPORTANT BODY THAN THE PROTOCOL IMPLIES. THE JNPC IS AFFORDED "CO-EQUAL" STATUS WITH THE PGNU BY THE LAOS PROTOCOL, BUT ITS POWERS ARE QUITE MURKY AND APPEAR PRIMARILY LEGISLATIVE. MORE-
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OVER, THIS BODY WILL MEET AT LUANG PRABANG, AND THUS WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY INFLUENCING THE COURSE OF GOVERNMENT IN VIENTIANE.

3. IN SOUPHANOUVONG'S PLACE AS PGNU DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER WILL BE PHOUMI VONGVICHIT, THE SENIOR LPF NEGOTIATOR OF THE AGREEMENT AND PROTOCOL. HE WILL ALSO BE FOREIGN MINISTER. PHOUMI OUTRANKS SOUPHANOUVONG IN THE LAO PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (I.E., LAO COMMUNIST PARTY), BUT IS BELOW SOUPHANOUVONG IN THE LPF LEADERSHIP. GENERAL SINGKAPO'S APPOINTMENT AS PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER IS ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT SURPRISE. ACCORDING TO A SOVIET

EMBASSY OFFICER, HE IS THE SEVENTH-RANKING FIGURE IN THE LAO COMMUNIST PARTY POLITBURO. HE WAS FORMERLY SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE PATHET LAO MILITARY FORCES, BUT HIS POSITION MAY HAVE BEEN ECLIPSED IN RECENT YEARS BY THE RISE OF KHAMTAY SIPHANDONE. IN HIS YOUNGER DAYS, SINGKAPO WAS REPUTED TO BE SOMETHING OF A PLAYBOY AND ONCE SERVED IN THE SAME UNIT AS PHOUMI NOSAVAN. HE HAS TRAVELED WIDELY ABROAD.

4. APART FROM PHOUMI VONGVICHIT AND GENERAL SINGKAPO CHOUNRAMANY, THE LPF CONTINGENT IN THE CABINET IS SECOND GRADE. FOUR OF THE TEN MINISTERS OR DEPUTY MINISTERS ARE "DISSIDENT NEUTRALISTS" WITH NO CLOUT IN PARTY COUNCILS. OF THESE, COLONEL DEUANE SOUNNALATH (INTERIOR DEPUTY MINISTER), IS A FIGUREHEAD WHO WAS DEPUTY COMMANDER OF SOUVANNA'S 1961-63 NEUTRALIST FORCES. HE BROKE WITH KONG LE OVER A PERSONAL MATTER AND THEN DEFECTED TO THE COMMUNIST SIDE WHEN THE COALITION BROKE DOWN IN 1963. KHAMMOUANE BOUPHA (DEFENSE DEPUTY MINISTER) IS THE DISSIDENT NEUTRALIST "WAR LORD" OF PHONGSALY PROVINCE, A FORMER STRONG SOUVANNA SUPPORTER WHO WAS CAUGHT BEHIND COMMUNIST LINES IN 1963 AND HAS BEEN UNDER CHINESE INFLUENCE FOR A DECADE. KHAMLIANG PHOLSENA (HEALTH DEPUTY MINISTER) IS A BROTHER OF FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER QUINIM, AND IS REPUTED TO BE A COMPETENT MEDICAL OFFICIAL IN THE PATHET LAO ZONE. HE IS DEPUTY HEAD OF THE LPF RED CROSS COMMITTEE. AS SUCH, HE MAY BE USEFUL TO HAVE IN TOWN IF THE ICRC OBTAINS A ROLE IN POW/MIA MATTERS. MAHA KOU (RELIGION MINISTER) IS PROBABLY A CRYPTO COMMUNIST, BUT HAS BEEN AN INEFFECTUAL FIGURE IN THE LPF DELEGATION HERE OVER THE PAST 18 MONTHS.

5. OF THE OTHER SIX, TIAO SOUK VONGSAK (INFORMATION MINISTER) AND SOTH PHETRASY (PLAN/ECONOMY MINISTER) ARE PARTY HACKS WITH NO SPECIAL AUTHORITY OR COMPETENCE IN THEIR NEW FIELDS. OUN NEUA
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PHIMMASONE (EDUCATION DEPUTY MINISTER) AND SOMVONG SOMESANITH ARE UNKNOWN (NOTE: SOMVONG, NOT LOFOUNG, WILL BE JUSTICE DEPUTY MINISTER). BOUTSABONG (FINANCE DEPUTY MINISTER) IS A BRIGHT BUT YOUNG PARTY FUNCTIONARY OF NO SPECIAL IMPORTANCE. HE WAS IN LPF NEGOTIATING DELEGATION AND IS POPULAR WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN VIENTIANE.

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ACTION EA-14

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6. ALL IN ALL, THE LPF CABINET CONTINGENT IS A MIXED BAG. ONE GOOD SIGN IS THAT SIX OF ITS MEMBERS HAVE HAD CONSIDERABLE EXPERIENCE DEALING WITH WESTERNERS, EITHER THROUGH THEIR LENGTHY PRESENCE IN VIENTIANE OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS OR, IN THE CASE OF SINGKAPO, THROUGH FREQUENT TRIPS ABROAD.

7. IF THE LPF SIDE OF THE CABINET IS REMARKABLE FOR ITS SURPRISES, THE RLG SIDE IS REMARKABLE FOR HAVING NONE. ONLY TWO MEMBERS OF THE PREVIOUS CABINET, SISOUMANG AND SOUK UPRAVAN, WERE DROPPED; OF THESE, SISOUMANG WILL BECOME RLG VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE JNPC. MOST OF THE OTHER PREVIOUS CABINET MEMBERS WERE MERELY RESHUFFLED. THERE ARE ONLY TWO NEW FACES; TIANETHONE CHANTHARASY AND SOMPHOU OUDOMVILAY.

8. LEUAM INSISIENGMAY AND PHENG PHONGSAVAN CONTINUE IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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POSITIONS THEY HAVE HELD SINCE 1962. SISOUK NA CHAMPASSAK, KHAMKING SOUVANLASY, KHAMPHAI ABHAY, AND OUDAY SOUVANNAVONG ASSUME DE JURE, THE DEFENSE, JUSTICE, HEALTH AND INFORMATION PORTFOLIOS THEY HAVE EXERCISED RESPECTIVELY AS SECRETARY OF STATE OR PRIME MINISTER'S DELEGATES FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

9. IN A BENEFICIAL MOVE, SISOUK BECOMES FULL DEFENSE MINISTER,

HANDING OVER THE FINANCE PORTFOLIO TO NGON SANANIKONE. THIS CHANGE PROBABLY REFLECTS THE DEAL THAT SAW SANANIKONE OPPOSITION TO FORMING THE NEW GOVERNMENT OUTSIDE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WITHER AND DIE IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS. SISOUK'S STEWARDSHIP OF THE DEFENSE MINISTRY WILL PROVE A BLESSING FOR OUR MILITARY ASSISTANCE POLICIES, ALTHOUGH PUTTING NGON SANANIKONE IN FINANCE REALLY SETS THE FOX LOOSE IN THE CHICKEN COOP. BUT IT WILL ALLOW SISOUK TO CONCENTRATE ON ADMINISTERING THE DEFENSE MINISTRY AND STRENGTHENING HIS MILITARY CONSTITUENCY.

10. THE PTT MINISTRY REMAINS A DISASTER AREA. "QUALIFIED NEUTRAL" KHAMPHENG BOUPHA IS AN INCAPABLE OLD SOUVANNA CRONY FROM THE 1962 COALITION GOVERNMENT; HIS DEPUTY, TOUBY LYFOUNG, OVERSAW THE OPIUM BUSINESS UNDER THE FRENCH AND LOST HIS TRADITIONAL POSITION AS "KING OF THE MEO" WITH THE RISE OF GENERAL VANG PAO OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS. BOTH "QUALIFIED NEUTRALS", KHAMPHENG BOUPHA AND KHAMKING SOUVANLASY, CAN BE EXPECTED TO SUPPORT PRO-WESTERN POSITIONS IN THE CABINET. HOUmphanh SAIGNASITH AND OUKAN VILAYSARN SQUEAKED INTO THE NEW CABINET AFTER DESPERATE LAST-MINUTE PLEAS TO SOUVANNA; NEITHER ARE EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND WILL BE ECLIPSED BY THEIR LPF SUPERIORS.

1. THE OTHER BRIGHT SPOTS, BESIDES SISOUK AS DEFENSE MINISTER, ARE TIANETHONE CHANTHARASY AND SOMPHOU OUDOMVILAY. TIANETHONE IS NOW AMBASSADOR TO DELHI AND PROBABLY THE MOST CAPABLE OFFICIAL IN THE LAO FOREIGN OFFICE. HE IS VIGOROUS AND BRIGHT, TRUSTED BY SOUVANNA, ALTHOUGH HE WAS ONCE A PHOUMI NOSAVAN SUPPORTER. IF FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUMI VONGVICHIT AND TIANETHONE CAN WORK TOGETHER UNDER THE PRIME MINISTER'S GUIDANCE AND HIS GENERAL GROUND RULES FOR LAO NEUTRALITY IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY CAN BEGIN TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A DECADE. TIANETHONE'S PRESENCE AT A HIGH LEVEL IS A VALUABLE ASSET FOR US AND PHOUMI HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MORE FLEXIBLE LPF LEADERS OVER THE PAST 18 MONTHS OF NEGOTIATIONS. SOMPHOU OUD-
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OMVILAY WAS FORMERLY DIRECTOR FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION AND IS NOW A POPULAR DEPUTY FROM VIENTIANE WHO HAS ASSIDUOUSLY COURTED SOUVANNA'S FAVOR AFTER HE DIVORCED ONE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S PROTEGEES. HE JOINS A COTERIE OF BRIGHT YOUNG MEN IN THE PLAN MINISTRY, WHO WERE EDUCATED IN THE UNITED STATES. THE PLAN/ECONOMY MINISTRY, HOWEVER, WILL PROBABLY REMAIN INEFFECTIVE UNDER SOTH PHETRASY.

12. THUS, OF THE FOUR KEY MINISTRIES OF INTERIOR, FINANCE, DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THREE ARE HEADED BY MEN OF CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL POWER WITH SECOND-RATE LPF DEPUTIES, WHILE THE FOURTH PAIRS A FLEXIBLE HIGH-RANKING LPF LEADER WITH A CAPABLE NON-COMMUNIST DEPUTY CLOSE TO SOUVANNA. THE RULE FOR CABINET DECISIONS ESTABLISHED BY THE PROTOCOL IS UNANIMITY. BECAUSE BOTH "QUALIFIED

NEUTRALISTS" WOULD SUPPORT THE RLG POSITION, HOWEVER, IF A MAJORITY VOTE WERE TAKEN, IT WOULD TURN OUT 13-11 IN FAVOR OF THE RLG SIDE, WITH SOUVANNA NOT VOTING. THIS IS NOT A BAD OUTCOME, BUT THE KEY QUESTION WILL BE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CABINET AND THE JNPC, GIVEN THE SURPRISING MOVE OF SOUPHANOUVONG TO THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE LATTER BODY. WE WILL COMMENT MORE FULLY ON THIS QUESTION WHEN THE FULL LISTS OF BOTH SIDES' JNPC CONTINGENTS HAVE BEEN ANALYZED.

13. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS, SUCH AS: WHAT HAPPENS NOW TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, CONSTITUTIONALLY SCHEDULED TO BEGIN ITS ANNUAL SESSION MAY 11; WHO BECOMES ACTING PRIME MINISTER IF SOUVANNA PURSUES HIS PLAN TO COMBINE A LONG VACATION IN FRANCE WITH STATE VISITS TO HANOI, PEKING AND MOSCOW, NOW THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS FORMED; WILL THE NEW CABINET SUBMIT THE ANNUAL RLG BUDGET TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR TO THE JNPC; WITH THE CHAIRMAN AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF BOTH LPF AND RLG DELEGATIONS TO THE JOINT COMMISSION TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT (JCIA), AS WELL AS THE SENIOR LPF PLENIPOTENTIARY NEGOTIATOR NOW SERVING IN THE CABINET, WHAT HAPPENS TO THE JCIA AND ITS IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF IMPLEMENTING THE POW/MIA, TROOP WITHDRAWAL, AND OTHER IMPORTANT PROVISIONS OF THE LAO ACCORDS? NO ONE HAS THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS YET, OR WILL HAVE, UNTIL THE TURN-OVER CEREMONIES OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PROCEDURAL STEPS, SUCH AS THE FIRST CABINET MEETING, ARE ACCOMPLISHED AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF LAOS BEGINS TO FUNCTION.

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